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CIA weighing prosecution of Post for Pelton article

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Central Intelligence Agency is reviewing an article published yesterday on the Pelton spy case to determine whether to seek prosecution under a law barring disclosure of intelligence secrets, said the White House spokesman, Larry M. Speakes.

The Washington Post, in an article on secrets that Ronald William Pelton allegedly sold to the Soviet Union for $35,000, said it withheld a description of betrayed technology after President Reagan, CIA Director William J. Casey and other administration officials urged the newspaper not to publish the material.

The *Post*'s executive editor, Benamin C. Bradlee, when asked whether the newspaper had deleted all the material requested by the administration, said: "I am sure we did not. We deleted what we felt appropriate, after discussion."

The article reported that U.S. officials believe Mr. Pelton "compromised a costly, long-running and highly successful U.S. operation that used sophisticated technology to intercept Soviet communications."

A "high-technology device" was used in the operation, which also involved U.S. submarines, it said.

James Bamford, an intelligence expert, said that the device might have been linked to the SOSUS network with which he said U.S. authorities monitor ship traffic in sensitive waters.

Mr. Speakes said the *Post* article "is presently being analyzed by the CIA to see if they have any specific problems with it. They have not indicated either way."

Mr. Casey also is asking the department to prosecute NBC in connection with a report on the Pelton case, under a 1950 law against the disclosure of intelligence gathered through the interception of communications. No news organization has ever been indicted under that law.

A CIA spokeswoman, Kathy Pherson, asked why the government sought to block publication of material allegedly obtained by the Kremlin, said the agency could not be sure that the information transmitted by Mr. Pelton was the same as that collected by *Post* reporters.

"In this business, I don't know that you presume the information is the same," she said. She said she did not know whether Mr. Casey would refer the *Post* report to the Justice Department.

A Justice Department spokesman, Brad Marman, commenting on the NBC case, said, "We have received the referral and are reviewing it."

The White House spokesman said that Mr. Reagan telephoned the *Post*'s publisher, Katherine Graham, May 10 "to communicate to her that some of the matters that we were discussing with the *Post* were very serious and that publication of them would do irreparable harm to our national security."

The *Post* article said some details about U.S. intelligence had been deleted before publication, although Mr. Speakes said that the final version was not reviewed by the White House.

The article said the president called Mrs. Graham at the request of Mr. Casey, who, at a May 2 meeting with *Post* editors, threatened to ask the Justice Department to prosecute the newspaper if it disclosed details of what the Soviets allegedly obtained from Mr. Pelton, a former National Security Agency employee whose espionage trial began in Baltimore this week.

After the meeting with Mr. Casey, the report said, the newspaper postponed publication of a more detailed article scheduled to appear in May 4 editions.

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